

JUNIOR LEAGUES OF MICHIGAN STATE PUBLIC AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

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House Education Committee
Rep. Brian Palmer (R-Romeo) Chair
March 15, 2006

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Michigan State Council of Jr. Leagues
State Public Affairs Committee (SPAC)

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State Public Affairs Committee (SPAC) of the Michigan State Council of Jr. Leagues is pleased to see that this committee is taking up SB's 327-330 that would promote early education as well as additional reading requirements for teachers to improve and increase early intervention programs for children across.

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The Jr. Leagues of Michigan are organizations of women committed to promoting voluntarism, developing the potential of women and improving communities through the effective action and leadership of trained volunteers. The SPAC committee serves as the advocacy arm for the nine member Junior Leagues of the State of Michigan. Each year we choose a specific policy focus in which to promote action in our communities. This year, we have chosen early childhood education and care for our young children.

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SPAC is very pleased to have the issue of early childhood education brought to the front and center of the policy debate on how best to strategically align services to young students in order to provide them with the tools for optimal success. There are many influences such as a mother's education level, family structure, race and income that significantly influence child outcomes. For instance, children in families that are low income often times perform behind their more affluent peers on language and cognitive skills and other factors. This is why we believe it is crucial to have strong early education programs in place that will reduce some of the gaps between children in struggling households

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The Georgia Early Childhood Study in 2001 by the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies at Georgia State University measured children's skills and behaviors that indicate the extent to which the children are prepared for success in school, including language and communication skills, cognitive development, health/physical well-being, social behaviors and attitudes toward learning. A specific focus of this study was to understand the effects of Georgia's Prekindergarten Program (Pre-K) on four-year olds. In 1995, Georgia became the first state to offer early education to all its four-year olds whose parents chose to enroll them.

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The study found that children made significant gains from the beginning of preschool to the end of first grade in terms of skills compared to national samples of children their age. The children began the year significantly behind peers their age across the nation but by the end of the first grade they exceeded the national norms on their

overall math skills, phonemic awareness and increased the absolute number of correct answers on all assessments of language and cognitive skills at each testing period.

In closing we support SB's 327-330 and appreciate the efforts by the bill sponsors and this committee in bringing this issue forward to better serve our children and their future.